

# **NORTHWEST**

## **EXISTING LAND USE**

The Northwest sector is a unique resource within the Town of Blacksburg. The entire area lies within the Tom's Creek Basin, which is approximately one third of the town's land area and extends into portions of the Southwest and North End sectors. It is located in northwest Blacksburg and is bounded by Price's Fork Road, Virginia Tech agricultural land, and private agricultural land to the South, the Route 460 Bypass to the east up to and including the Brookfield/Deerfield subdivisions, and the corporate limits to the north and west. Major roads serving this area include Tom's Creek Road, Glade Road, Meadowbrook Drive and Shadow Lake Road. Neighborhood planning areas in the sector are the Tom's Creek and Glade-Westover neighborhoods. Public water is available to all development in the area, though sanitary sewer is available to a limited area, close to the Route 460 Bypass.

The area's major features include Tom's Creek, contributing tributaries, and surrounding flood plains. The land is characterized by rolling terrain with areas of moderate slope, and steeper sloping areas to the northwest at the foot of Brush Mountain. A Town park with softball fields is located on Tom's Creek Road. Most of the area maintains the appearance of being rural and agricultural. Single-family houses and farmsteads with outbuildings are sprinkled throughout the sector, primarily along existing streets. More intense single-family neighborhoods with approximately four homes per acre are located along Glade Road near the Route 460 Bypass. Over 80 percent of the area included in the sector is comprised of parcels in excess of five acres in size. Low intensity agricultural uses or very low-density residential development are prevalent in the area, contributing to the rural character upon which the community places a high value. The pattern of future development in this area is critical to the preservation of open space and agricultural land uses within the town.

The community values the scenic beauty of the area, with its rolling hills, pastures with grazing horses and cows, springs, streams and ponds, wildlife, fence rows, and views of Brush Mountain and the George Washington - Jefferson National Forest. The Tom's Creek neighborhood is the largest area of primarily open land remaining in the town. As demand for residential areas in Town increases, the sector will face increasing development pressures. Development that does occur in the area should be designed in a way that preserves the natural and agricultural character of the area.

## ***Unique Characteristics***

***Tom's Creek flows through this sector and its associated floodplain and most surrounding land remains undeveloped.*** The creek flows through Montgomery County and concludes at the New River. Tom's Creek and adjacent land is designated as a greenway corridor. The greenway will be a major segment of the town's trail system and will provide an additional recreational and scenic area for Blacksburg residents.

***The sector abuts the George Washington - Jefferson National Forest.*** The national forest provides recreational opportunities such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, camping and fishing, and picnicking at the nearby Pandapas Pond recreation area. The U.S. Forest Service also owns land within the town's view shed and its land use decisions have an impact on views of Brush Mountain from Town. The mountainside is a dominant scenic feature for the town and is the primary view within the sector.

***The majority of this rural area is sparsely developed and features rolling hills and steep slopes.*** Approximately 2,500 acres are agricultural or vacant. This constitutes almost half of the town's existing open land. Much of this open land is well suited for raising hay, livestock grazing, or very low-density residential uses. Seventy percent of this land area is made up of parcels of ten acres or more, which contributes to the open feel of the area.

***Town parks serve as recreational amenities to residents of the sector and the town.*** Tom's Creek Park, if expanded in size, could better serve the needs of the larger community and has a well used softball field. Brown Farm Park is at the heart of the community both physically and psychologically and will continue to be the jewel of the region.

## ***Critical Issues***

***Public wastewater systems are not provided to the majority of the residents in the sector.*** Sewer service is only provided to the Glade-Westover neighborhood. Capacity in the town's sewer system is limited and few new connections can be accommodated without the construction of a centralized sewer system in the Tom's Creek Basin. Construction of sewer to serve this area was a condition of the 1973 annexation by the town. The town is researching the feasibility of decentralized wastewater treatment systems as an alternative to a centralized system. There are several systems that may effectively serve the sector but lower installation costs may be offset by higher maintenance costs over time. The town will implement a public wastewater system once a final cost/benefit comparison study has been completed. When a public sewerage system is constructed, proper land use regulations must remain in place to preserve the community's preferred development pattern.

***Intensive development could negatively impact water quality in Tom's Creek.*** If measures are not taken to preserve a natural buffer surrounding Tom's Creek, the natural filtration of stormwater runoff will be compromised. Areas of steep slope abutting the floodplain have a high potential for erosion, contamination, and siltation in the creek. Developments that do not take the proper measures to mitigate stormwater runoff will contribute to downstream flooding and negatively impact water quality in Tom's Creek and the New River. The Creek Valley Overlay District defined in the town's Zoning Ordinance is the primary tool preventing development in these sensitive areas. This overlay district will play a crucial role in how the sector develops and should remain in place.

***Brush Mountain is a dominant scenic feature for the town and is the primary view within the sector.*** Steeper sloping areas near Brush Mountain are not well suited for development and should be preserved as open, forested land or developed as very low density residential. If the mountainside is developed and forest cover is significantly disturbed, scenic views will be compromised. Continued education with private landowners and cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service are necessary to protect this truly, invaluable resource.

***Potential exists for development of a major greenway corridor and linkages to the national forest.*** Most of the land adjacent to Tom's Creek is currently undeveloped and could be preserved as a major greenway corridor. If actions are not taken to work with landowners, development could encroach along the proposed corridor. No public access currently exists to the national forest from the town side of Brush Mountain. Linking this greenway system to the national forest, and other local and regional trails, will provide convenient access to outdoor, passive recreation for Blacksburg residents.

***Neighborhood commercial uses to serve residents should be carefully integrated into the development pattern.*** There are currently no commercial establishments located in the immediate area to serve local residents. This is currently appropriate considering the rural nature of the sector. As the area becomes home to more residents, small-scale neighborhood commercial uses will be needed to serve the immediate area. How these uses fit into the rural landscape will be an important consideration.

***Protect the agricultural character and viable pastureland in the area even as pressure for development increases.*** Agricultural uses and the rural landscape define the character of the Northwest sector. As new residential developments are designed and constructed, it will be important to preserve this rural and agricultural character. Development should be appropriately located away from roads and be consistent with the character of the surrounding area. Low density, environmentally sensitive street lighting is also important for protecting the area's rural integrity. It is crucial for the community to ensure that regulations and development pressures do not force agricultural uses from the area. The preservation of significant open space is a major policy of the town.

***Many landowners are unaware of their land preservation options.*** Many landowners have indicated an interest in preserving their land in an open or agricultural state but are unsure of their options. Continuing to educate landowners of legal and land use tools that can be utilized to protect their land, such as conservation easements for tax credits, will be important to preserving the character of the area. In addition to educating landowners, the town should work with the state and private, non-profit organizations to help preserve open space, and should develop guidelines for direct acceptance of land donations or easements. This will ensure that opportunities to acquire and protect public land are not missed.

***Development of the sector will necessitate road improvements*** to Tom's Creek, Shadow Lake, and Glade Roads including bike lanes and sidewalks, and an interchange at the intersection of the Route 460 Bypass and Tom's Creek Road. The current at grade intersection at Route 460 and Tom's Creek Road is not adequate to safely serve future traffic. A grade separated interchange with pedestrian and bicycle access will alleviate this concern.

## ***Neighborhoods***

The Northwest sector is a rural area with development. There are currently two neighborhood planning areas in this sector— Glade-Westover and Tom's Creek. These neighborhoods vary greatly in that Glade-Westover is a mix of several typical suburban-style subdivisions and Tom's Creek is very rural and contains larger parcels that are either pasture, land under other agricultural use, or very low density or planned residential. There is a high rate of owner occupancy throughout the sector.

### **Glade-Westover**

The Glade-Westover community lies along the southeastern portion of the sector near the Route 460 Bypass on both sides of Glade Road. This neighborhood is served by only one major road, Glade Road. This neighborhood is very homogenous in composition with similar income levels and other typical demographics. The residents are very appreciative of the surrounding open space including the agricultural uses, national forest, Brown Farm Park, their neighborhood and mini-parks, historic landmarks, and the opportunity for the Tom's Creek Greenway.

### ***Critical Neighborhood Issues***

- ◆ Cluster housing is a concern because of its “urban” character within the rural and suburban setting of Glade-Westover. Cluster developments need to provide large dedications of open space and honor other “special use” proffers, conditions, or agreements. Shadowlake Village is the town's first co-housing development and exemplifies the issues between cluster and traditional suburban housing styles.

- ◆ The transportation system needs improvement with road straightening or widening, the addition of turn lanes and transit stops where appropriate, and bike lanes, sidewalk, and trails along all collector and arterial roads and many local streets. Speed enforcement is a primary concern along with other Town residents.
- ◆ Soil erosion and stormwater run-off are key environmental concerns that the town should strictly monitor. As development continues throughout the sector, more rooftops and pavement and undersized storm drains and retention ponds will lead to more run-off and non-point source pollution of groundwater, as well as sedimentation of streams by erosion.

### **Tom's Creek**

This neighborhood is very large and contains the subdivisions of Deerfield, Brookfield, a Planned Manufactured Home park, and thousands of acres of agricultural land and very low density residential development. Most of the private agricultural land is within the Agricultural and Forest District (AFD). The university agricultural land is not part of the AFD. This area will evolve into smaller neighborhood areas as development along Tom's Creek Road and Glade Road expands.

Tom's Creek residents are also extremely conscientious of the rural character and natural beauty of the Tom's Creek Basin. Stormwater and sediment controls, strict development standards, protection of the ridgelines, preservation of cultural resources, passive development of parks and open space, and implementation of public and private decentralized wastewater systems are primary issues in the area.

### *Critical Neighborhood Issues*

- ◆ The transportation improvements supported by Glade-Meadowbrook residents are priorities throughout the sector. The interchange at Tom's Creek Road and Route 460 Bypass and completion of roadway improvements along the entire length of Glade Road are the top two priorities. Access to Prices Fork Road via a future collector road from Glade Road (Heather Drive Extension) is also recognized as a public safety and transportation need in the future.
- ◆ Cluster housing developments should provide large dedications of open space and proffer other special conditions or agreements to minimize any negative impacts to the surrounding area. The Village of Tom's Creek and Brookfield are two examples of single-family, limited mixed-use cluster housing. These developments received density bonuses for their dedications of open space and other considerations intended to result in high quality residential developments.
- ◆ Stormwater controls and non-point source pollution is also a primary concern. Preserving agricultural uses, minimizing the number of special uses and "exceptions" to zoning and development regulations, and dedications of

significant open space when rezoning for higher intensity uses are strongly encouraged.

- ◆ Historic landmarks should be identified and protected throughout the sector and town. The historic cemeteries, places of worship, and land uses give the neighborhood a unique cultural identity that should be preserved.
- ◆ The town's firearms training facility should be relocated out of the area since single-family residents surround its location next to Tom's Creek Park. The town is pursuing a location in the industrial park or other suitable areas that isolates the facility from other uses.
- ◆ Good comprehensive planning, proactive land use policies, and a strong enforcement and maintenance of existing development regulations and land use policies by the town is critical to minimizing negative environmental impacts due to development in the sector and maximizing the preservation of open space, greenways, and park land.

## VISION

The Northwest sector is a rural residential area in which homes are located close together in groups preserving significant open space that protects natural resources such as water quality, tree cover, wildlife, and scenic vistas. The natural terrain and drainage ways are maintained by sensitively siting development to take advantage of natural features, and to minimize physical and visual disturbances.

The natural and agricultural character of the sector is preserved, while achieving creative residential site designs. There is a central greenway core that surrounds Tom's Creek which is public, undeveloped, and includes large pastures and natural vegetation. This central greenway is a recreational, scenic, and natural resource, protecting water quality in Tom's Creek and underground aquifers, and providing large areas of natural open space and wildlife habitat. Greenways provide pedestrian and bicycle linkages to the rest of Town and the George Washington - Jefferson National Forest.

The area's natural beauty is enhanced through the preservation of large amounts of open space within and between individual developments and the maintenance of scenic views and unique features. The basin contains a variety of housing styles, including farmsteads, which are served by public utilities and improved two lane roads with a limited number of intersections. Many recreational opportunities exist including athletic fields and trails for public use.

There is a small amount of neighborhood commercial development within the sector. These businesses cater to the needs of the local residents and do not attract significant additional traffic to the area. Larger scale commercial exists in the Southwest sector on Price's Fork Road adjacent to Hethwood and is easily

accessed by the Glade-Price Fork Connector Road. The site design and scale of commercial structures are in harmony with the rural character of the area.

### ***Special Considerations***

- ◆ A public wastewater system will be provided for this sector and the larger Tom's Creek Basin.
- ◆ The Creek Valley Overlay District is necessary to protect water quality and reduce the potential for contamination.
- ◆ Any land disturbing activities, fertilizer and herbicide application, or other possible sources of water contamination should be set back an adequate distance from Tom's Creek with natural vegetative buffers to protect water quality.
- ◆ Land and/or scenic easements should be acquired along Tom's Creek to create a large greenway.
- ◆ An Open Space Land Use Assessment tax break is needed to encourage the dedication of open space by large landowners.
- ◆ Development should be clustered on less than half of the site with the remainder of the property being reserved as permanent open space.
- ◆ Preservation of open space is a special consideration when reviewing development in the Northwest sector. Ridgelines, hilltops, land identified in the Greenway Master Plan, land adjacent to existing public parks, to existing preserved open space or to the Creek Valley Overlay is of significant value to the community. It may be appropriate to consider an increase in density for the development of a parcel where land of significant value off-site will be preserved as open space. This special consideration may only occur if the land is determined to be of significant value to the community and the additional density does not compromise the integrity of the receiving site. Approximately three-quarters or more of the off-site parcel may be proffered as permanent open space.
- ◆ Both public and private efforts to preserve agricultural and open lands through land trusts, open space easements, purchase of development rights, and fee simple acquisition are encouraged.
- ◆ Agriculture is encouraged as a by right use in the Tom's Creek neighborhood.
- ◆ Approval of special use and rezoning requests for neighborhood commercial uses will be considered when appropriate design criteria are achieved. Commercial uses should be designed to serve the immediate community and be very small in scale.

- ◆ Inclusion of small-scale neighborhood commercial uses in large planned residential developments will be considered. These establishments should be pedestrian oriented and not generate additional traffic from outside of the immediate area.
- ◆ Commercial uses that are intended to attract people off of the Route 460 Bypass should not be permitted in the sector.
- ◆ Reduced neighborhood street widths will be supported to promote a more rural setting if the safety of users is not compromised and development is located away from the right-of-way.
- ◆ Places of worship are shown on the future land use map in their 2001 locations, because they are important anchors in a neighborhood and should be retained. They are an appropriate use in most neighborhoods when developed at a scale consistent with the surrounding community, as allowed by special use permit. The town does not wish to limit future locations of places of worship to the indicated map areas.
- ◆ Sidewalks, footpaths, or appropriate alternative pedestrian circulation systems should be constructed in all new residential developments.
- ◆ Improvements will be made to Tom's Creek Road, Shadowlake Road, Meadowbrook Road, and Glade Road including two lanes, bike lanes, sidewalk, and off-road trails as appropriate to ensure the safety of current and anticipated residents.
- ◆ A future collector road from Glade Road (Heather Drive Extension) to Prices Fork Road is needed to improve traffic flow, alleviate congestion, and recognized public safety and other transportation needs as the area develops.
- ◆ A grade separated interchange at Tom's Creek Road and the Route 460 Bypass is needed and will be constructed within the next five years.



### ***Changes From Existing Land Use Map***

- Future development adjacent to either the Route 460 Bypass or the Prices Fork Road and Tom's Creek Road interchanges should be well planned to minimize deterioration of the viewscape. Appropriate screening and innovative construction are encouraged to preserve the view shed along these vital traffic corridors.
- Tom's Creek and its surrounding floodplain are designated as open, and this area is intended to be a major feature of the town greenway system.
- Land designated as Very Low Density Residential may be included in Conservation Overlay, Planned Residential, or Rural Residential zoning districts.
- A Conservation Overlay District may include limited very low density residential development, recreation areas, agricultural land, and open space.